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Message Text

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42
ACTION PM-04

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 SS-15 SP-02 NSC-05 L-03 EB-07

MC-02 OMB-01 IGA-02 AID-05 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

TRSE-00 /061 W
---------- 050395
R 291158Z DEC 75
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6108
INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI
SECDEF WASHDC
COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

S E C R E T BANGKOK 26893

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, PFOR, TH
SUBJECT: F-5E AIRCRAFT

REF: BANGKOK 26892

1. DURING CHARGE'S DISCUSSION WITH MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS KOSON DECEMBER 29, KOSON BROUGHT UP QUESTION OF THAILAND'S DESIRE FOR F-5E AIRCRAFT. HE SAID THAT AT SAME MEETING BETWEEN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THAI MILITARY AT WHICH U.S. RESIDUAL PRESENCE HAD BEEN DISCUSSED, ROYAL THAI AIR FORCE HAD MADE STRONG PITCH FOR F-5ES. (KOSON NEVER USED THE WORD QUOTE BUY UNQUOTE OR QUOTE PURCHASE UNQUOTE, AND MADE CLEAR WITHOUT SAYING SO THAT WHAT WAS DESIRED WAS IN THE FORM OF A GRANT.)

2. KOSON BOLSTERED HIS IMPLIED REQUEST BY SAYING THAT THAILAND HAD RECEIVED INFORMATION THAT VIENTIANE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT WAS BEING PREPARED TO RECEIVE AND STATION MIG AIRCRAFT. THAILAND LACKED DEFENSE AGAINST AIR ATTACK. WHEN THAILAND HAD EARLIER EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT INCREASED THREAT FROM U.S. FIGHTER AIRCRAFT
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LEFT IN VIETNAM UPON TAKEOVER BY COMMUNISTS, U.S. HAD

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ASSURED THAI THAT THESE AIRCRAFT LACKED ABILITY TO CARRY OUT STRIKE ON THAILAND AND RETURN TO BASES BEFORE RUNNING OUT OF FUEL. STATIONING OF HOSTILE AIRCRAFT AT VIENTIANE HOWEVER, WOULD DRAMATICALLY ALTER THIS SITUATION AND PERMIT, FOR EXAMPLE, AIR ATTACKS ON RAMASUN. TO COUNTER THIS THREAT, THAI MILITARY THOUGHT F-5E AIRCRAFT WERE NECESSARY.

3. CHARGE SAID THAT IN ORDER TO AVOID FUTURE MIS-UNDERSTANDING OR MISCALCULATION, HE WOULD SPEAK VERY FRANKLY: HE SAW NO PROSPECT WHATSOEVER OF F-5E AIRCRAFT BEING SUPPLIED ON GRANT BASIS. IN RESPONSE TO AN EARLIER RTAF REQUEST, U.S. HAD PROVIDED LETTER OF OFFER TO SELL F-5ES TO THAILAND. LETTER OF OFFER HAD EXPIRED, WHICH MEANT THAT U.S. COULD NO LONGER GUARANTEE SAME PRICE AND DELIVERY SCHEDULES. IF, HOWEVER, THAILAND DECIDED TO BUY, NEW LETTER OF OFFER COULD BE DELIVERED.

4. KOSON ASKED CHARGE'S OPINION AS TO WHETHER F-5ES WOULD BE WISE PURCHASE FOR THAILAND. IN REPLY, AND NOTING HIGH INITIAL AND MAINTENANCE COSTS, CHARGE POINTED THAT THAT WAS POLICY DECISION FOR RTG TO MAKE. IMPORTANT FACTOR WOULD BE RTG'S THREAT ASSESSMENT, THAT IS, WHETHER RTG CONSIDERED THAT THREAT OF OVERT ATTACK (PRESUMABLY BY NORTH VIETNAM), JUSTIFIED EXPENDITURE INVOLVED IN ACQUIRING F-5ES, OR WHETHER RESOURCES WOULD BE BETTER COMMITTED TO THE THREAT THAT WAS GENERALLY CONSIDERED MORE PRESSING, THAT OF SUBVERSIVE INSURGENCY.

5. DISCUSSION OF F-5ES CONTINUED WHEN CHARGE AND POMIL COUNSELOR MOVED TO FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI'S OFFICE. CHATCHAI REPEATED ESSENTIALLY SAME POINTS MADE BY KOSON, AND CHARGE REPEATED HIS POSITION. CHATCHAT SAID THAT A MEETING WAS TO BE HELD LATER DECEMBER 29 WITH THAI MILITARY WHO HAD ATTENDED PREVIOUS MEETING, AND THAT HE WOULD INFORM THEM U.S. RESPONSE.

6. CHATCHAI ADDED THAT THERE WERE THOSE WHO FAVORED THE ACQUISITION OF MIRAGE AIRCRAFT FROM FRANCE.

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HE SAID THAT HE, HOWEVER, WAS AGAINST THIS, SINCE IT WOULD INTRODUCE FOREIGN WEAPONS SYSTEMS INTO THAI-LAND'S BASICALLY AMERICAN ARSENAL. WE AGREED AND POINTED OUT THAT I LONG RUN, MIRAGES WOULE IN ANY CASE PROVE NO LESS EXPENSIVE THAN F-5ES.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH NEITHER CHATCHAI NOR KOSON LITERALLY ASKED FOR F-5ES AS GRANT ASSISTANCE, THAT

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WAS CLEARLY THE INTENT OF THEIR EXPLORATORY REMARKS,
AND THEY PRESUMABLY WILL TELL THE THAI MILITARY THAT
THE U.S. HAS TURNED DOWN THEIR REQUESTS FOR F-5ES ON
A GRANT BASIS.
MASTERS

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Decaption Note:
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